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ABSTRACT

Increasing demands for home health aides to the frail elderly and disabled, coupled with a high rate of turnover among these aides, has led to growing concerns over worker recruitment and retention in the home care industry. This paper therefore describes a model developed to explain job satisfaction and turnover among home health aides. The model was tested using survey data collected for a Ford Foundation-sponsored home care demonstration in five cities. The methods used to estimate the model included an adaptation of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire to the circumstances of the home aide's job. This instrument was administered to workers employed by 17 agencies in five cities (Boston, Massachusetts; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; New York City, New York; San Diego, California; and Syracuse, New York). Based on critical path analysis, a causal model was developed to explain two outcomes of the questionnaire: intrinsic job satisfaction and intent to leave the job. Youth, loneliness, and dissatisfaction with pay and benefits were the major determinants of aides' intent to leave, while factors affecting workers' job satisfaction included positive attitudes about pay and benefits, supervisor supportiveness, and task variety. The importance of age as a predictor of turnover suggests that employers should focus their recruiting efforts on older workers, who because of temperament or lower employment aspirations seem more inclined to stay with the job. (Tables are included.) (TE)

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Understanding Job Satisfaction and Turnover in the Home Aide Work Force

In recent years decreasing unemployment rates, tightened immigration laws, and increasing demand for home care have led to reports of homemaker/home health aide shortages in many communities in the United States (Laxton, 1988). The current supply of about 250,000 home aides providing personal care, homemaking, and chore services to the frail elderly and disabled is apparently barely sufficient to meet the current demand for service. By 2020 an additional 1 million aides will likely be needed to provide an estimated 50 million hours of paid care each week to some 9 million elderly.[1] In this context concerns over worker recruitment and retention have pervaded the home care industry and attracted the attention of reporters and politicians as well. Once accepted as a necessary concomitant of employing low wage,

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[1]Findings from the 1982 National Long-Term Care Survey showed that about 4.6 million or 19 percent of individuals aged 65 and older living in the community were in need of help with some activities of daily living (GAO, Sept. 1986). Assuming no change in disability rates, Manton (1987) has estimated that by the year 2020 over 9 million elderly will require more than 242 million hours of assistance per week. Assuming that, as in 1982, 80 percent of those hours were filled by "informal" care givers, the home care industry would have to provide about 50 million hours per week. To do so would require 1.25 million home aides to provide 40 hours of service per week.

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low status, disproportionately minority workers, high turnover in the home aide work force has become a salient problem for providers and policy makers worried about its impact on accessibility and quality of care (Lombardi, 1988).

Worker dissatisfaction with low pay, minimal benefits, inadequate training, and stressful work is widely thought to contribute to high turnover rates--ranging from 30 to 70 percent across agencies and estimated at 60 percent industry-wide (Surpin, Nov. 1987). This paper describes a model developed by the authors to explain job satisfaction and intent to turnover among home aides. The model was tested using survey data collected for a Ford Foundation- funded home care demonstration in 5 cities (Feldman, 1988). First the paper presents the rationale for focusing on job satisfaction and intent to turnover. Then it describes the methods used to estimate the model, reports on the variables found to be significantly related to the outcomes of interest, and discusses management and policy implications.

THE RATIONALE FOR STUDYING JOB SATISFACTION AND INTENT TO TURNOVER

The rationale for studying job satisfaction was threefold: (1) Job satisfaction has been shown to be an important determinant of worker absenteeism and turnover in a variety of settings (Staw, 1984; Price and Mueller, 1986). Turnover disrupts agency operations and continuity of service. Thus

improved understanding of the determinants of worker satisfaction could facilitate agency management; increase worker reliability; and improve continuity of care, a critical dimension of service quality. (2) Job satisfaction may also be correlated with other less quantifiable dimensions of quality, such as the nature of communication between worker and client and the degree of rapport established during worker-client interactions (Weisman and Nathanson, 1985). (3) Finally, job satisfaction may be viewed as an intrinsically valuable outcome in itself. Home aides perform a socially important function in exchange for minimal remuneration. Job satisfaction may be among the most significant rewards for this difficult job, and managers may wish to improve job satisfaction, job commitment, and job involvement whether or not their impact on absenteeism or turnover can be quantified.

"Intent to turnover" was used as a proxy for actual turnover because the authors did not have access to actual turnover data for most of the workers who responded to the survey. In studies of actual turnover, workers' statements about their intent to leave the job have generally been the most important determinant of turnover (Mobley, 1982; Price and Mueller, 1986).

METHODS

The authors adapted a standard demographic and job satisfaction questionaire--the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, et. al., 1983)--to the particular circumstances of the home aide's job and administered it to

workers employed by 17 agencies in five cities (Boston, Milwaukee, New York City, San Diego, and Syracuse). With the exception of Boston, all of the cities were selected because they were the site of a demonstration project. Boston was chosen because its close proximity to the research team allowed additional data collection at minimal cost. The agencies were a mix of for-profit and non-profit agencies chosen either because they were participating in the Ford Demonstration or for comparison purposes. The characteristics of the agencies included in the survey are summarized in Table 1.

At 10 of the agencies questionnaires were distributed by mail to a random sample of workers drawn from employee payroll lists. At 7 of the agencies questionnaires were administered in person to attendees at in-service training meetings. The response rates of workers who received the questionnaires by mail varied from a low of 10 percent at one Boston for-profit agency to a high of 67 percent at one Syracuse non-profit agency; response rates at most agencies were in the 45 to 50 percent range. Because home aides are scattered across multiple individual work sites, are rarely required to report in person to agency headquarters, frequently lack telephones or permanent home addresses, and often leave the job after a month or two of service, they are an extraordinarly difficult population to reach. Logistical problems lead, in turn, to the problem of "selection bias." Those who can be reached through mail, phone, or on-site contacts may constitute the most stable and possibly

most satisfied segment of the worker population. On the other hand, it is possible that those who respond to surveys are motivated to do so because they are the most dissatisfied with their work. The high levels of overall job satisfaction reported by respondents to the survey suggest that the bias was probably in the direction of overrepresenting committed and satisfied workers. Unfortunately, the resources available for the survey were not sufficient to allow contacting of non-respondents to estimate the selection bias problem.[2] The questionnaire was ultimately completed by 1284 home aides employed by 17 agencies in the five cities. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the demographic characteristics and the work-related attitudes of survey respondents.

THE MODEL: EXPLAINING JOB SATISFACTION AND TURNOVER

A causal model was developed to explain two outcomes: intrinsic job satisfaction and intent to leave the job, as defined below:

> Intrinsic job satisfaction ("the chance to learn new things," "the chance to do work suited to my abilities," "the chance to take part in making decisions," "the chance to accomplish something worthwhile")

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[2]At one Boston agency, the research team explored the representativeness of workers who completed the questionnaire at inservice meetings by comparing their demographic characteristics to a random sample of workers who had not attended the inservice meetings. The two groups did not differ significantly with respect to age, race, education, job tenure, or wage. However, such a comparison provides no indication of whether or how the groups might have differed in attitudes toward the job.

Intent to turnover ("I will probably look for a new job in the next year").

Based on theoretical and empirical work in the field (Mobley, 1982; Price and Mueller, 1986), the assumption was that these outcomes were determined by both individual characteristics that workers brought to the job and their perceptions about various aspects of the work itself. The work experience included supervisory support, task and role aspects, extrinsic rewards (pay and benefits), and intrinsic rewards (e.g., ability to do worthwhile work).

RESULTS

Critical path analysis (a method of ordinary least squares regression in which groups of determinants are used as independent variables for successive dependent variables) was used to estimate the causal model. Figure 1 illustrates the model that emerged from the analysis. (The direction of the effect of each variable is shown by the arrow, and the positive or negative relationship between two variables is given by the sign in parentheses.) The model contains only determinants with direct effects (i.e., standardized betas) greater than +/-.15 (and $p < .001$). The significant variables are generally consistent with other research in the field linking various personal characteristics and aspects of the job to intentions to stay or leave.

Youth, loneliness, and dissatisfaction with pay and benefits were the major determinants of aides' intent to turnover. As has

been found in other studies, younger workers were more likely than older workers to express intent to leave. Aside from lower job mobility in general, which seems to be associated with increasing age, older workers may have lower job expectations, lesser financial needs, or greater "investment" in the job.

Another principal determinant of intent to leave--a finding unique (though not unsurprising) to this study--was loneliness. The job of the home aide lacks organizational support (e.g., a facility in which she regularly works, colleagues she regularly sees, supervisors who regularly provide instruction and feedback). Thus, loneliness or feeling isolated on the job appears to be one of the structural or inherent conditions of home care. Nevertheless, feelings of isolation were directly impacted by perceived training adequacy (or inadequacy); apparently, agencies can mitigate workers' perceptions of loneliness. The third major determinant of intent to leave was dissatisfaction with pay and benefits. Consistent with other studies of worker turnover, monetary rewards and other material aspects of the job significantly affected the turnover intentions of survey respondents.

With regard to factors affecting workers' job satisfaction, positive attitudes about pay and benefits, supervisor supportiveness, and task variety all had significant positive and direct effects. Furthermore, supervisor supportiveness had both direct and indirect effects--making this component of the job an

extremely important one for agency managers concerned with the quality of work life.

Finally, race had a significant impact on worker perceptions. Black workers were more likely to perceive the job as monotonous, a perception leading to lower satisfaction. Real or perceived discrimination might be one reason for black workers' reports of job monotony: to the extent that such workers were channeled into the home aide's job because of lack of other opportunities, they might have experienced greater boredom than white workers who could exercise greater choice. In relationships outside the causal model, black workers were also found to be less closely bonded to their clients and more likely to perceive pay inequities than white workers.

IMPLICATIONS

The importance of age as a predictor of turnover suggests that employers may want to focus their recruiting efforts on older workers, who because of temperament or lower employment aspirations, seem more inclined to stick with the job. It also suggests that younger workers may require special training, support, and/or supervision if their turnover is to be reduced. Given the general tendency of younger workers in all kinds of jobs to demonstrate higher turnover rates, however, there are probably limits to the effectiveness of age-focused activities.

Because the home aide work force is disproportionately black, the significance of race as a predictor of job satisfac-

tion has important (and potentially disturbing) managerial and social implications. At the least, it suggests that black workers experience particular difficulties on the job (especially related to worker-client relationships) that employers ought to address. More disturbing, it suggests that some portion of the black work force may be stuck--because of discrimination, lack of skills, lack of education, or lack of opportunity--in home aide jobs to which they are ill suited. This cannot be good for either quality of work life or quality of care.

Training adequacy, task variety, and supervisor supportiveness--all important determinants of worker loneliness, satisfaction, and/or turnover--are all to some extent subject to managerial discretion. Dictated largely by the needs of the client, task variety may be the most difficult area for employers or policy makers to address. Nevertheless, agencies may be able to make improvements in this area by using training to develop better mechanisms for coping with the boring aspects of the job and by using scheduling to vary workers' routines. As for training and support in general, employers could allocate resources to reinforce and supplement the minimal training workers receive on entry, develop special skills and career tracks for experienced workers, and expand their supervisory staff to allow more time for supportive interaction.

Like task variety, loneliness is also largely dictated by the nature of the job itself, which often requires long hours in the company of no one but an incommunicative or difficult client.

Nevertheless, the inverse relationship found in the analysis between perceived training adequacy and loneliness suggests that agencies can mitigate workers' perceptions of isolation. In addition to teaching workers how to cope with the absence of peers and supervisors, agencies could strengthen the support function, perhaps by promoting a select group of aides to visit homes on a more frequent basis and serve as liaisons between the agency and workers in the field.

Finally, unlike monotony or loneliness, low pay and poor benefits are clearly not inherent to the home aide's job, although their prevalence in the industry has made them seem so. The significance of dissatisfaction with pay and benefits as a predictor of intent to leave the job suggests that improvements in this area ought to yield significant reductions in worker turnover.

The challenge for the industry and for others in society concerned about the accessibility and continuity of care is to persuade public and private third party payers--who account for about 70 percent of home care expenditures--to finance the work life improvements likely to yield increases in worker satisfaction and reductions in turnover.

Table 1

Characteristics of Agencies Participating in the Job Satisfaction Survey

	For-profit	Non-profit	Union	Non-union	Public clients only	Mixed clients
Boston N = 7	2	5	3	4	1	6
New York City N = 2		2	2		2	
Milwaukee N = 2	1	1		2		2
San Diego N = 3	1	2	1	2	1	2
Syracuse N = 3	2	1		3		3
Total 17	6(35%)	11(65%)	6(35%)	11(65%)	4(24%)	13(76%)

Table 2

Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

		(Missing responses)
Median age	45 years	
Median education	12 years	
Percent not high school grads.	39%	
Percent Female	98%	
Percent Black	49%	
Percent Hispanic	7%	
Married	42%	
Mean number of children under 6 years	.6	(798)
Mean number of children between 7-21 years	1.5	(528)
Workers who care for an aged parent	18%	
Primary wage earner	65%	
Median hourly pay	$4.31	(387)
Median personal income	$7,000	
Median household income	$13,000	(403)
Family income under $10,000	45%	
Health insurance through agency or union	19%	
No health insurance	22%	
Percent with more than 1 job	18%	
Workers who usually work fewer than 35 hrs/week	54%	
Workers who usually work 35 hrs/week or more	46%	
Workers who usually work more than 40 hrs/week	25%	
Workers who have a car	49%	

*N = 1284

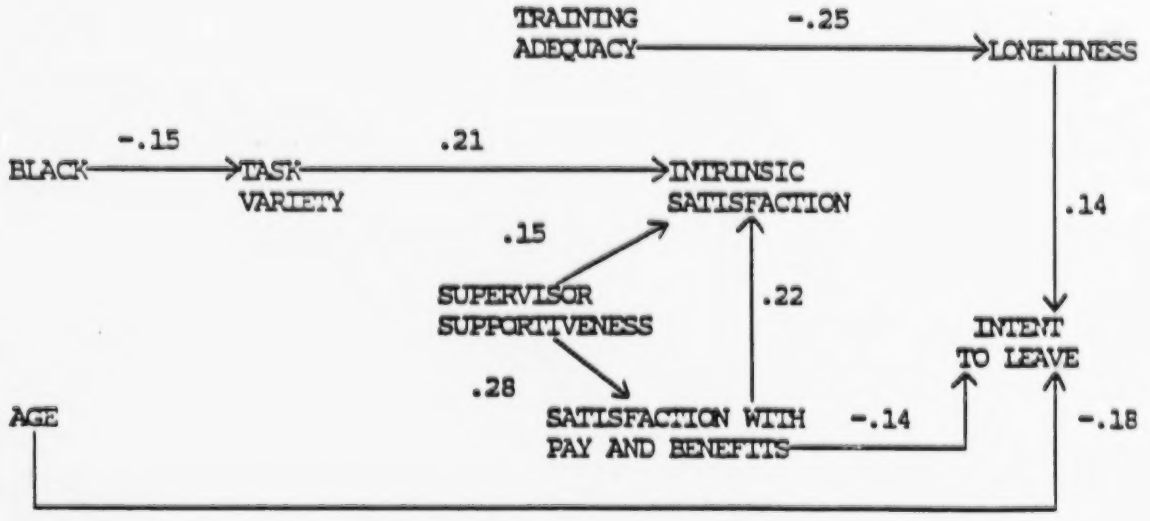
Table 3

Attitudes of Survey Respondents*
17 Sites

	Satisfied** (Slightly or Very)	Dissatisfied** (Slightly or Very)
Pay	35%	51%
Benefits	34%	52%
Pay/Benefits construct	24%	55%
Oppor. to Advance	44%	34%
Hours Worked	69%	21%
Info. problems (occasionally or more often):		31%
Equip. problems (occasionally or more often):		26%
Percent who feel lonely in the job:		16%
Percent who intend to look for a new job in the next year:		18%
Training Adequacy	81%	13%
Opportunity to Help	93%	3%
Treatment by Superv.	86%	7%
Treatment by Company	78%	11%
Intrinsic job satisfaction	68%	11%
Overall job satisfaction	84%	9%

*N = 1284
** Workers responded on a 5 point scale including very satisfied, slightly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, slightly dissatisfied, very dissatisfied.

FIGURE 1



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ABSTRACT

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UNDERSTANDING JOB SATISFACTION AND TURNOVER IN HOME CARE
Dissatisfaction with low pay, minimal benefits, inadequate training, and stressful work is widely thought to contribute to high turnover among home aides who serve frail elderly clients. This paper describes a model developed by the authors to explain variations in job satisfaction and turnover among home aides. Demographic and job satisfaction data were collected from approximately 1500 home aides at 12 agencies in 5 cities, using a standard instrument adapted for home aides. Actual turnover data during the year following administration of the survey were collected for a subgroup of the population. Using path analysis, variables found to be significantly related to variations in overall job satisfaction include perceived training adequacy, supervisor support, job problems, and satisfaction with benefits. Overall job satisfaction is linked to "intent to turnover" and to actual turnover. The management and policy implications of the model are explored.